

September
2005



State Senator Liz Brater

The Lansing Report

Traveling the State to Hear Testimony on Water Use

In January I reintroduced legislation that would put into place the Governor's Water Legacy Act, a comprehensive set of laws that would protect the Great Lakes from water withdrawals. We have held two successful town hall meetings on this subject in Ann Arbor and Monroe, and I look forward to additional meetings throughout the state.

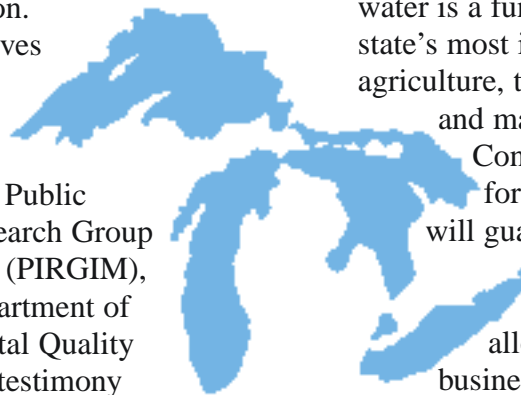
Sen. Mickey Switalski joined me in hosting the Ann Arbor meeting, where access to clean water dominated the discussion. Representatives from Clean Water Action, the Sierra Club, Public Interest Research Group in Michigan (PIRGIM), and the Department of Environmental Quality gave expert testimony backing the necessity of this legislation. Citizens shared concerns regarding the lack of action in the legislature to prevent further diversion from the Great Lakes Watershed.

In Monroe, citizens shared stories of home wells running dry and fears of polluted lakes. Mining operations in Monroe County have pumped massive amounts of the area's groundwater, affecting the level of the water table. Those present expressed the necessity to act quickly to prevent further disruptions to the groundwater supply. Sen. Gilda Jacobs was also present.

The legislation is needed to protect our water resources for future generations. Michigan's water is a fundamental part of the state's most important industries: agriculture, tourism, utilities, and manufacturing.

Consistent, fair rules for water withdrawals will guarantee a dependable water supply for these industries and allow individual businesses to establish long-term water use practices.

Future town hall meetings are planned in Muskegon, Grayling, the Upper Peninsula, and St. Clair Shores.



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Budget Update

As of printing, the state legislature has not yet approved a budget for Fiscal Year 2006 (which begins October 1, 2005). Michigan is experiencing severe fiscal challenges, and tough decisions must be made. In May, Governor Granholm proposed a balanced budget, trying to preserve the social services safety net and protect funding for public and higher education. Unfortunately, the legislative leadership responded with cuts that would penalize our most vulnerable citizens, forcing those on Medicaid to pay more for health care. Despite the ongoing deficit, the Senate Majority is also pushing for further tax cuts for businesses.

The following are some highlights of the budget debate as of August:

Working Poor



Included in the Senate's proposed Department of Human Services (DHS) budget was a \$5 million cut to child-care subsidies for low-income, working parents. I put forth an amendment to the DHS budget that would have reinstated this funding, but it was not successful. Other DHS cuts that I oppose include a reduction in transportation funding for social service workers and a decrease in funding for juvenile justice services.

Health Care



The Senate also proposed hard cuts to the Department of Community Health (DCH) budget. Medicaid coverage for over 40,000 low-income citizens could be eliminated, calling on many patients to pay premiums for their coverage, an expense Medicaid recipients cannot afford. Additionally, the Senate budget included a \$9.8 million reduction in the MI Choice waiver program, the program that keeps long term care patients out of nursing homes and in their own homes by allowing the Medicaid reimbursement to fund in-home care.

Education



Despite the voices of 12,000 educators and supporters who rallied for better K-16 education funding at the Capitol last month, education appropriations continue to be inadequate. For the third year in a row, K-12 funding allowances have not kept up with inflation. Additionally, vast cuts are being made in higher education, including the elimination of work study programs and scholarship grants.

Environment



The Senate's Department of Environmental Quality budget contains a provision to make it easier for large factory farms to pollute our rivers and groundwater. These huge animal operations release large amounts of manure and other pollutants. I attempted to amend the budget to maintain strict controls on these facilities. The amendment failed on a party-line vote, but I will continue to fight to regulate these operations.

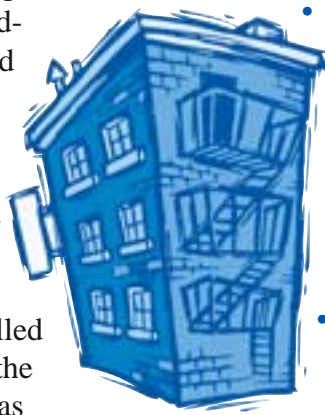
Taxes



The Senate Majority proposed eliminating the Single Business Tax altogether. This would rob the state's general fund of one quarter of its revenue and eliminate the statute requiring that the "rainy day fund" contain \$250 million before this tax can be reduced. There is little evidence that the tax cuts of the 1990s have stimulated the Michigan economy. We need to have business taxes that help support an educated workforce, a sound infrastructure, and a recreation system that will attract business to the state. Furthermore, business tax cuts will shift the tax burden to individuals or force further cuts in basic services.

Renter's Rights

In the fall, many Washtenaw County tenants enter into new leases. If you run into trouble or have questions about your lease, there are many resources at your disposal. Ann Arbor has a Tenants Union, an organization that will help you examine your lease or deal with legal problems relating to your landlord-tenant relationship. And for students, both the University of Michigan and Eastern Michigan University have student legal services offices that will provide free legal assistance to enrolled students. Additionally, the Michigan Legislature has created a booklet called "Tenants and Landlords: A Practical Guide," which is available from my office.



Keep in Mind:

- It is illegal for a landlord to charge a security deposit in excess of more than one and a half times the monthly rent. This total would include the last month's rent if that is paid in advance.
- It is lawful for the landlord to begin the eviction process for all members of a dwelling if one tenant does not pay rent and the other residents do not cover that rent.
- In most situations, your landlord cannot lawfully prevent you from subleasing your space.
- Landlord claims that you must pay their legal fees if you sue for funds and lose usually are untrue.

Helpful Organizations

Ann Arbor Tenants Union

(also the Michigan Tenant Counseling Program)

(734) 761-8599

U of M Student Legal Services

(734) 763-9920

<http://studentlegalservices.dsa.umich.edu/>

Eastern Michigan Student Legal Affairs

(734) 487-1055

How to Choose a Home Builder

We have received several complaints from constituents who have been targeted by unscrupulous home building contractors. The Department of Labor & Economic Growth (DLEG) recently released a brochure to assist citizens with decisions related to choosing and working with a building contractor. The brochure includes information on the necessary permits and licensure, advice on choosing a builder, suggested payment schedules, and information on how to resolve disputes.

There are plenty of honest builders doing excellent work for a fair price. I hope this set of guidelines will help you choose the right contractor as you make major decisions about your home. The brochure is available from my office, or you can access the information on DLEG's website at: www.michigan.gov/builders



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Brater to Represent State at Transportation and Land Use Conference

Gloria Jeff, Director of the Michigan Department of Transportation, has invited me to attend an Executive Seminar on Coordinating Transportation and Land Development in Irvine, CA from September 6-8. The conference, funded by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, will bring

together delegations from six different states to discuss transportation and land use as they relate to economic and community development. I will argue for rational land use and transportation planning that allows a mix of options for citizens to travel to work. County and local officials round out the delegation.

Michigan Joins Streamlined Sales Tax Effort

Every year Michigan loses approximately \$300 million in sales tax revenue from internet and catalog sales. Mail-order consumers, not retailers, are liable for sales tax payment on goods purchased from businesses not physically located within the state of Michigan. This, in effect, has made mail-order sales tax revenue unenforceable.

In an effort to make it easier for out-of-state retailers to

voluntarily comply with multi-state sales tax collection, 18 states, including Michigan, have agreed to coordinate their tax language. The Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Agreement (SSTA) will define the rate at which different types of goods are taxed for all states in the agreement. The agreement establishes a system through which sellers can remit taxes.

Want to Know More?



Mailing funds are limited and I would like to keep in touch with you. Please take a minute to e-mail me at

senlbrater@senate.michigan.gov and send me your e-mail address so I can send you legislative updates. If you don't have e-mail, please call my toll-free number to receive updates by mail. Thank you!

Mark Your Calendar

Town Hall Meeting

October 24, 2005 • 7-9 pm
101 Morris Lawrence Building
Washtenaw Community College

Coffee Hour

November 7, 2005
8-10 am
Zou Zou Cafe
101 N. Main
Chelsea

